

## THE DESIGN OF BAPTISM.

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A LITTLE crab-apple tree grew in our yard once, and as boys we drew our little wagon around it many times; we knocked the bark off of it; we broke off its limbs, and threw at it for a mark. Finally it assumed a form peculiar to itself. We could tell the cause of its present shape better than any one else, because we had watched its growth.

Ideas and thoughts and doctrines grow, and you can tell better what you believe, if you know why you believe it, and how you came to that belief. Various positions on the design of baptism have been strongly taken by different men in different ages, and opinions differ widely at the present time. Very early in the Christian era baptism was regarded as essential to salvation. Yet should one professing conversion die before he could be baptized his confession was considered sufficient. Baptism and regeneration were frequently considered as the same thing. Virtue was believed by many to be in the baptismal water itself.

*About the year 500*, the idea of the necessity of baptism had grown considerably. Without baptism meant without salvation, and there were no exceptions. Augustine had pressed the importance of baptism, and through his influence the church throughout the West had come to the general belief that even infants, unbaptized, were lost.

*About the year 1000*, somewhat of a reaction from previous opinions on the subject had taken place. It seemed hard to think of the innocent little ones as going to destruction; and that, when having done no wrong, nor being themselves accountable. Now came the idea of an abiding place for infants that die unbaptized, the *limbus infantum*, *i. e.*, where God is not, but otherwise it was not a particu-

larly unpleasant place to be; or where only light punishment was inflicted.

*About the year 1500*, we are in the heat of the reformation. Luther assumes that infants can exercise faith; while others say they certainly cannot. The Augsburg Confession allows that baptism is necessary to salvation, and the Scottish Confession emphatically denies it. Too much of any one idea will invariably bring about the opposite extreme. In trying to break away from the evils of their day, even the reformationists found themselves taking very one-sided opinions. And isn't it perfectly natural? So, to-day a man can find company in the holding of any opinion whatever. Yet it is not company that we may be seeking, except the truth and its happy assurance.

*Baptism* is an act of obedience. "Be baptized," Acts 2 : 38, was the earnest preaching of the apostle Peter. It is the will of the Lord Jesus who commissioned Peter to preach. A mother remarks to her son that her eyes are growing weak, and that some of these years she will have to begin to wear glasses. That son loves his mother. He says to himself, "I will surprise mother and get her the glasses now." She had not told him to get them for her. She had hardly hinted for them. Yet the son procured them because he loved her. If God, on the other hand, had merely hinted that baptism was a good thing, good people surely would be seeking baptism, because they love him. But there is not a hint. He asks you to do it. He tells you to do it. He *commands* you to do it. Now, what is the measure of your love to him? Love acts. Love obeys. Obedience is the best test of love to a superior.

*Baptism is a test of faith.* "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" Luke 6: 46, is a straight question. Straight questions ought to be answered fairly. Avoiding an issue of right, I am condemning myself. How does my faith compare with a grain of mustard seed when my Lord has given me an injunction and a

promise, and I expect to win the promise on some other basis? So doing, do I not question his veracity? And why do I call him Lord, Lord, when I make my own conditions and leave him only to make the promises? Faith in anything acts for, and in harmony with it.

We claim a change of relationship with the Lord when accepting him. And now, in his own way, we make an open confession of that change. *It is the complement of the inward birth, both together sealing the promise.* Divide a right angle into two parts, equal or unequal, and the one part is the complement to the other. Each is complementary to the other, and without either the angle is incomplete. The water-birth without the spirit-birth is of little value, and the spirit-birth without the water-birth is incomplete. "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit," John 3: 5, his birth is not complete.

We may not claim the Spirit and neglect the water. We dare not urge the water and neglect the Spirit. Both, or neither, promise or not. By both the promise is sealed. This is best of all, to be sure of heaven's favor. "Ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Acts 2: 38. "And he went on his way rejoicing." Acts 8: 39. "He shall be saved." Mark 16: 16. Here is the promise sealed, for this life and that which is to come.

*It is "the answer of a good conscience toward God."* 1 Peter 3: 21. All heaven calls to every sinner, "Cease to do evil," "Learn to do well," "Come unto me." A good conscience toward God will certainly answer the call of God. In baptism we are answering the call. A good conscience, when enlightened by the truth, will call, too, for surrender and submission to the Lord. And in love to him we answer that call and are baptized in his name.

*It is for the remission of sins.* One time a student asked a great preacher whether a man could be saved without baptism. His answer was: "I know this, that with it he has the sure promise." So it is with us. The question is not

whether we can have our sins forgiven without baptism, but being great sinners we seek a sure remedy. John preached the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins and Mark records it without wavering. Mark 1: 4. Peter preached baptism for the remission of sins, and Luke makes mention of it in full faith. Acts 2: 38. Paul, too, believed that in baptism he had his sins washed away. Acts 22: 16. And from the time of these ancient, worthy men unto the present day there have been witnesses and there are now many who would gladly testify that in the obedience unto baptism in water they had a barrier between them and God removed, and then saw, brighter than ever before, the clear light of heaven.

It is in the blood of Christ we have the hope of our salvation. Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins. Heb. 9: 22. No more is the sacrifice offered up, for Christ is our sacrifice. We are baptized into Christ. More, we are baptized into his death. Paul's words are these, "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?" Rom. 6: 3. Was it not in his death that the saving blood was shed? And if we are baptized into his death, have we not the blood applied? Can not we sing, "Washed in the blood of the Lamb?" Can we not then say we are saved by the blood of the Lord Jesus? Can this be called baptismal salvation? Ah, the blood of Christ is the sin-cleansing power, and is applied by faith and simple, loving obedience.

*In conclusion, it may be added* that the church is a divine institution. Baptism has long been considered the initiatory rite by which believers are admitted or born into the kingdom of God. So may it continue to add glory unto the name of him whom we claim as our Savior.

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